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NEWS RELEASE

Dec. 10, 2005

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MONTANA HITS MILESTONE IN NUMBER OF NONRESIDENT VISITORS

MISSOULA—

Preliminary results from recent research conducted by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at The University of Montana show that the number of nonresidents who come to the state each year reached a milestone this year.

The state had 10 million nonresident visitors during 2005.

That does not mean that 10 million cars drove into Montana this year – the average group size was a little more than two people per travel party – but it does indicate a strong year for travel in the state by car and by air.

In fact, nonresident visitation in Montana increased 4 percent over 2004 numbers, the same increase expected in the United States in 2005 by the Travel Industry Association. And these nonresidents were spending money in Montana at a rate of more than \$1.9 billion per year and contributed more than 29,000 jobs, as well as \$531 million in generated income.

A review of some key preliminary indicators within the travel industry of Montana shows that it was a strange year for visitation. Many indicators suggest that the state would have seen a decrease in overall visitation this year.

For example, both Glacier and Yellowstone national parks experienced decreases in

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visitation through October. The 2004-05 ski season in Montana was abysmal because snow conditions around the state were poor. The research shows an 18 percent decrease in skier visits.

This decrease in the number of skiers most likely may be attributed to resident rather than nonresident skier days, however. Discussions with major ski area representatives indicate that nonresidents still came to the state to ski, but locals were harder to please.

On the upside, the number of motel rooms rented increased 3 percent in 2005 over 2004, and airport deboardings increased 7 percent this year. This number increased during 2005 at the eight airports in **Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Missoula and West Yellowstone**. West Yellowstone's airport showed a 77 percent increase; however, keep in mind that West Yellowstone provides the least amount of visitors compared to the larger cities in the state.

The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research is housed at The University of Montana College of Forestry and Conservation and conducts tourism research annually for the state.

Reports are available at the institute's Web site, <http://www.itrr.umt.edu>.

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